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PRONUNCIATION IN THE SCHOOLS¹

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I

The degree of attention now given to the oral speech of pupils in our schools is an excellent thing. In the older books for teachers and pupils, little emphasis was placed on the sounds of the language. It was often taught as a dead, inert thing, as something written, not spoken. Much might be said in books, or by the teacher, of etymologies, or derivations; and word-meanings deserved and were given especial attention. But the spoken language aroused comparatively little interest until recent times. It is true that occasionally, in these days, one encounters critics who believe that oral English is now given too large a place in the average curriculum. Possibly, by way of reaction against the older indifference, a few enthusiastic teachers do overemphasize it; but this circumstance, if true, need arouse no misgivings. It is surely salutary that the spoken speech is now taken into account so carefully.

The use of good spoken language, the language of the educated class, is not the special prerogative of the well-to-do. An acceptable pronunciation is within the reach of nearly every pupil in school who wishes to achieve it. It does not require a great expenditure of time; for it can be practiced in or out of school all day long. It needs but a certain amount of knowledge and alertness to notice; and it needs the will to persist and to assimilate from good models. It is very easy, however, to remain unconscious of faults and mannerisms of speech, if one is left without help or stimulus.

I should like to use my space in a practical way, and hence I shall proceed at once to a few cautions and a few exhortations. No doubt some of them may be superfluous, and with some of them my hearers may not agree. But if those who attend the meetings of teachers' associations never heard anything superfluous, or repeti-

¹ Paper read before the English section at a recent meeting of the Nebraska State Teachers' Association at Omaha.

tive, or inauthentic from those who address them, theirs would be a remarkable experience.

II

My first caution is, do not rely too far on British dictionaries, in these days. It is of interest to consult them, but they are no longer to be cited as authoritative for American English; and their entries might lead those who examine them into trouble. Some examples of words having divergent pronunciations in England and the United States are:

schedule	trait	bomb
lieutenant	squirrel	hostile
again	been	
against	invalid (noun)	

The old pronunciation of "shone," rhyming with "gone" is still in general use in British English, but "shone" is a rhyme for "alone" in the United States. "More" and "door," unless in the protraction of the vowel, hardly differ from "maw" and "daw" in the pronunciation of the Londoner; but it would be foolish for an American speaker to endow them with the open vowel and the loss of *r*. Just as certain words like "jug" (U.S. "pitcher"), "biscuit" (U.S. "cracker"), "guard" (U.S. "conductor") now have different meanings in British and American speech, so do many words now have different pronunciations.

Second, do not follow American dictionaries blindly, or defer to any one of them completely, unless it be to a late one. Usages change, and dictionaries, from the nature of things, must be conservative. One must expect them to be belated in recording changes. For instance, many good speakers said "peremp'tory" before the dictionaries recorded this pronunciation alongside "per'emptory." The conservative pronunciation of the nouns "survey'," "ally'," "address'," is on the last syllable, but the accent is now in process of change to the first syllable, "sur'vey," "al'ly," "ad'dress," and coming dictionaries may be expected to recognize this.

It is doubtful whether too rigid a position should be taken with regard to words in which the accent is now in a state of fluctuation, as

illustrate	advertisement
demonstrate	contemplate

It is probably wise to leave considerable latitude when dealing with a body of words the pronunciation of which has not yet settled down; and it is well to remember that there will always be such a body of words. Sometimes it is a vowel element in the word, not the accent, in which there is fluctuation, as in "ee-ther" or "eye-ther," "is-olation" or "ice-olation." Probably the body of words with which it is most puzzling to deal at the present time is a group of French loan-words. It is difficult to take a decisive position with words like these:

menu	débris
debut	valet
buffet	garage

The pronunciation of "depot," once a subject of much discussion, has now settled down to one usage. For "bouquet" the dictionary pronunciation is still "boo-kay'," but it is a pronunciation which one seldom hears.

What is one to teach with reference to the sound of short *o*? It is hard to make recommendations; for American English is losing its short *o* and turning it into long open *o*, or into *ah*. Should one say "dawg," "fawg," "bawg," or "dahg," "fahg," "bahg"? There is different usage for different parts of the United States; and there is no consistency observed even for words within the same group; e.g., I say myself "dawg" but "fahg." Some would-be purists go so far as to insist upon the vowel *a* of "artistic" in words like "Florence," "orange," "coffee," "horrid," although the real purist should strive for the preservation of the original short open *o* sound, yet heard in British usage; not for the substitution of a sound which is not an *o* sound at all.

Third, I should like to caution those who deal with pronunciation not to harp upon a few selected points, at the cost of a sense of proportion. For example, I am no enthusiast as regards the time spent in some class-rooms on the cultivation of the so-called "intermediate *a*," the favorite word for exemplifying it being "aunt," as over against the broad "ahnt," or the flat "ant," with the vowel of "ran." I confess to feeling much like Dr. G. P. Krapp of Columbia, who writes:

. . . . standard British speech and some forms of New England speech have [ah][†] in the words in question [*dance, laugh, branch, etc.*]. . . . New England has exerted, and to some extent continues to exert, a strong influence upon formal instruction and upon notions of cultivation throughout the country the pronunciation [ǣ] is often prolonged, or drawled, and nasalized in a way that makes it seem not merely American but provincially American. To steer between the Scylla of provincialism [ǣ] and the Charybdis of affectation and snobbishness [ah] many conscientious speakers in America cultivate [intermediate *a*]. The writer has tested this sound on many groups of speakers from various sections of the country, and has never found one who used the sound who did not do so with a certain degree of self-consciousness. If the cult of this sound continues long enough, it may in time come to be a natural and established sound in the language. In the meantime it seems a pity that so much effort and so much time in instruction should be given to changing a natural habit of speech which is inherently just as good as the one by which the purist would supplant it. Especially in public school instruction it would seem to be wiser to spend time on more important matters in speech than the difference between ["hǣf" and "hahf."]

Professor C. S. Grandgent of Harvard has pointed out the fluctuations of vogue of the so-called "broad *a*." When Worcester's dictionary appeared in 1830, the "ah" sound in "fast," "aunt," etc., belonged apparently in more vulgar speech, while *a* (the vowel of "ran") was the "elegant" pronunciation, and to many seemed to have the appearance of affectation.

. . . . Today, on the contrary, in the consciousness of most Americans, "fahst" implies a striving after Old World elegance, while "fast" is characteristic of up-to-date democracy. Thus we do change our vowels, as our garments, in accordance with the inscrutable decrees of Fashion.

Professor Grandgent's feeling with regard to school cultivation of the "intermediate *a*" is much like Dr. Krapp's.

The time given to the cultivation of an artificial *a* sound might in many cases be given more profitably to our manner of pronouncing *r* and *l*. These consonants should usually be made with the tongue tip pointed and at the bony ridge of the gums. In the Central Western region there is a tendency to retract the tongue and curl the tip of it toward the middle of the roof of the mouth, leaving a distinctively shaped passage which modifies the acoustic quality of the vowel in a way which is very perceptible to those who

[†] Substitution is made, in the matter inclosed within brackets, for the phonetic symbols employed by Dr. Krapp.

are not natives. According to our critics, among whom was Henry James, it impresses the unpracticed ear as resembling "speaking with the mouth full." The aesthetic effect of such pronunciations, e.g., in words like "Dorothy," "part," "corn," "fall," "girl," "people," is much worse than the aesthetic effect of the use of *ǣ* (one of the most frequent sounds in our language) in words like "aunt" and "fast."

Another matter which impresses me as too hard worked is the matter of word or syllable demarcation in instances like "don't you," "not at all," "nature," "education." If the extreme care shown in such pronunciations were applied to all words showing the same phonetic conditions ("venture," "culture," "meet you") one's speech would seem over-precise or artificial. The carrying over of consonants is natural for the English language, as it is for French. To bar it for certain words and expressions but allow it for the majority of words goes contrary to a sense of consistency. To proceed to another instance of unnecessary care, "litera-tyure'" is a good pronunciation, but the pronunciation which slurs or shortens the last syllable is more natural and is perhaps in better usage. In Great Britain this word usually has but three syllables, "lit'rityur." Sometimes to be over-careful is as annoying a practice as to be too slipshod. One is reminded of the story of the English governess who laboriously taught her pupils to say "moun-tain," "foun-tain," because she thought that justice should be done to the last syllables of these words. The word "exit" might be cited in this connection. Why are some purists so careful to say "egzit"? It is not the dictionary pronunciation, nor that of the best speakers, and there is nothing to justify it in the history of the word.

III

Leaving the matter of general cautions, or of over-emphasis upon selected points, I should like to list some words recurring in the experience of every teacher, regarding which there can be no doubt as to which is the good and which the improper usage. There is no conflict of opinion in these instances; for such words have achieved their standard forms, and divergences from these forms are dialectal. For convenience I classify my examples, most of which were collected for me by students. In classes in the

English language (although the matter must not be overdone) students can often be stimulated to vigilance against faults by observing and collecting divergences from the standard speech which they find in their own usages or in those of others. What, for example, is a more profitable exercise, on the oral side of speech, for "Better English Week," than the observation and recording by interested pupils of the infractions of standard pronunciation which they hear about them daily?

Recessive accent, stressing and often protracting the initial syllable, appears in instances like "bo-quet," "e-vent," "deed-lighted," "fi-nance," "tre-mendous," "de-fects," "re-cess," "direct," "I-talian." Needless to say it should be discouraged. Every teacher is used to hearing the accent misplaced in words like these, some of which take also an added *i*: "mischie'v(i)ous," "evident'ly," "harass'," "impo'tent," "medie'v(i)al," "barbar'(i)ous," "blasphe'm(i)ous." Sometimes it is thought to be a source of comedy deliberately to misplace the accent. Some words frequently subjected to this treatment (though sometimes the wrong accentuation is due to ignorance) are, "positive'ly," "favorite'," "massacre'," "pictures-que'," "fati-gued'," "genuine'." The vogue of many of these supposedly facetious forms has come from the vaudeville stage.

Important, because the users of these forms are so unconscious of their omissions, are words in which consonants are allowed to drop out. Instances of this fault are very numerous and it is profitable for any teacher or student to be vigilant concerning them. Here is a typical list:

woy-yer (warrior)	inseck	Febuary
secketary	attrack	government
labatory	scanalous	artic
quanity	reconize	

Some instances of consonant transposition, especially the transposition of "r" are "prehaps," "hunderd," "interduce," "modren," "childern," "pertend," "perportion," "perscription," "prespiration," "larnix," "pharnix." Some instances of consonant addition or intrusion, especially of "r", are the following: "Warshington," "warsh," "langridge," "furtherst," "intregal." "reconnorter," "distingrish," "acrost," "oncet," "mightnt," "asphynxiated,"

"municipal." The initial *h* has been restored in the standard pronunciation of "humble," "herb," "humor" ("yumor" is still heard but is old-fashioned); but, though it seems to be coming back, the sounding of the medial *h* is not yet in accepted usage in "forehead." In "vehement" and "vehicle" the *h* is to be omitted. Some consonant substitutions which are often heard from pupils appear in "culbert" for "culvert" and in the substitution of *m* for *n* in "sebm" (seven), "elebm," "robm," "ribm," "telephome," etc. A distinct *t* sound should be preserved in words like "lecture" (not "lek-sheer"), "puncture," "punctual," "century," etc. Sometimes it is hard to impress this point upon pupils. "Tremenjus" should not be substituted for "tremendous." As for "yes," how novel it would seem if sometimes this word retained its final consonant, instead of becoming "ye-uh," "yah," or "yep." In the instances where it keeps its final *s* it is sometimes stretched out into "yeyus."

To pass to a few points concerning vowels, it is important, for one thing, to be careful as regards final vowels. Some words which should preserve their final *o* are "potato," "window," "fellow." The names "Missouri," "Mississippi," "Cincinnati," should have final *i* not *a*, while, on the other hand, the names "Iowa," "Nebraska," "Canada" should have *a* not *i*. The vowel should not be shortened in "plague," "sleek," "creek," "chic," "clique," and it should not be lengthened in "pleasure," "measure," "treasure." American English usually has "lei-sure," while British English likes "lezh-ure" and terms the American pronunciation "old fashioned." Some instances of vowel intrusion which have been collected and given to me by students are: "elum," "filum," "burgular," "atheletic," "girul," "schooul," "transelation," "cathederal," "umberella." "O fullag of my country" is an apostrophe once heard from a Fourth of July orator.

The syncopation of a syllable is frequent in words like those in the following list. Care should be taken that pupils give to such words all their syllables.

vetinery
tempory
contempory

itinery
physickly
practickly

frantickly
scientificly

Syncopation is standard in many British pronunciations which are infrequent in the United States.

dif'frent	blackb'ry	reg'ment
med'cine	sep'rit (the adjective)	second'ry
ordin'ry	mili'try	

The syncopations "dif'frent," "dif'frence" have good standing, on both sides of the Atlantic, while, on the other hand, the syncopations "differ'nt," "differ'ce," which are often heard in America, have not. "S'prise," "po-try," "pome," "prob'ly" are other syncopations which are often encountered by the teacher.

These lists might be protracted indefinitely, but enough examples have been given to show the type of material which may be accumulated by the interested student outside the class hour; and to show some of the staple words which are likely to suffer from mispronunciation. The word "mispronunciation" is itself extremely likely to be both spoken and spelled "mispronunciation"!

What now is to be said in closing? It is somewhat futile to seek to lay down absolute rules or to accept a rigid standard, or to be too insistent concerning words which are in the process of changing. But there are some things for which we can strive without being over-pedantic or over-slack. We can try to rid ourselves and our pupils of pronunciations which are everywhere recognized as dialectal. We can do our best to avoid the careless and the slipshod, so far as in us lies, without veering to the opposite extreme. We can endeavor to familiarize ourselves with the usages indicated in our best guides, the dictionaries, without following them blindly, or with too credulous confidence in their dicta. Between the two evils of the reckless and the slipshod, and of overanxiety and punctiliousness, the exactingness of the little-minded, we can try to find the mean. Above all, we can at least free ourselves from insistent egotism concerning our own pronunciation or the pronunciation of our individual locality.